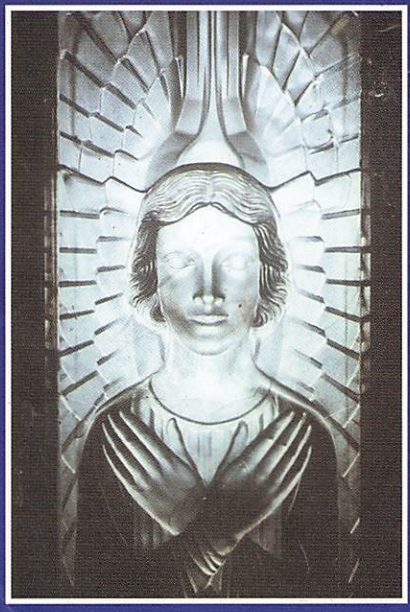
St. Matthew's Church



Guide Book

Welcome to St. Matthew's Church. The first part of this booklet gives you a guided tour around this unique collection of the work of René Lalique of Paris in collaboration with A. B. Grayson, a local architect. The second part gives you a more detailed insight into the interesting history of the church building. We hope that you find both to be informative and enjoyable.

The attraction of St. Matthew's Church lies in its glass, not the stained glass associated with the windows of ancient churches, but the moulded white glass, formulated by Lalique and used by him to make much of the furniture of the church normally associated with wood and stone. Both these materials are here but only to complement the glass.

As you pass into the main church from the vestibule through the oak doors notice the simple glass panels of a pattern not found anywhere else in the church, and the interesting glass-rod handles.

The Font

This is well worth examining in some detail as it is believed to be the only glass font in the world. The stand is of moulded fluted glass and is the only piece to bear the maker's name, inscribed on the base. The font bowl itself is the only example of clear glass with etching in the church.

The Windows

It is difficult to believe that every piece of glass in the building was designed and made by Lalique, but it is true. The windows are composed of panels of moulded glass, once held in place by mullions of chromium plate, now replaced by anodised aluminium because of weathering, and depict the stems, leaves and flowers of Amaryllis belladonna or the Jersey lily. The lily motif, sometimes Jersey, sometimes Madonna, symbolising purity, is echoed throughout the church.

The Screens

These reflect the window design and as will be appreciated, do much to promote the symmetry of the interior so important at that time of architectural development. The obelisk-style supports are of Portland stone as is the main floor, the walls having been lined with Bath stone. Moving to the centre of the church you will see flanking the aisle at the entrance to the Chancel, identical pulpit and lectern, designed by Mr Grayson. Both these and the floor of the Lady Chapel are constructed in Hopton Wood stone whose texture and colour are echoed in the communion table.

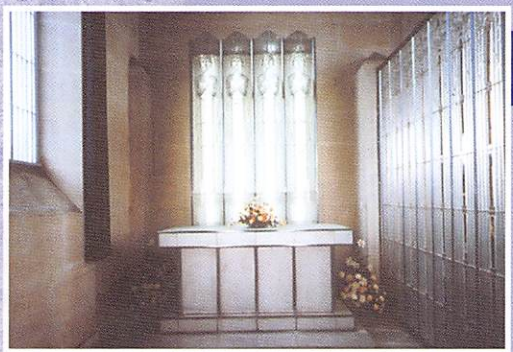
The Communion Table

The main table, situated at the south end of the church, is composed of frosted silvered glass panels which at first glance give the appearance of stone. These panels, like the communion rail, screens, balcony rail, and the windows (before corrosion necessitated their replacement with aluminium) are held in place with chrome stalls. The top of the table is a single sheet of frosted glass measuring some 200cm by 71cm. On the table stand two chromium plate candlesticks, housing wax candles on an ingenious spring system which allows only the flame to be visible at the top. These are lit during communion services and other special occasions and display a masterly combination of the real and the artificial.

The Cross

Behind the communion table towers a magnificent glass cross – the focal point of the church – standing over 4 metres high. It is flanked by two pillars standing two metres high, which, like the cross, display Madonna lilies in high relief at their summits.

The cross and pillars are internally illuminated, an example of Lalique's interest in the electrical enhancement of his work at this period of his life. The whole area is also discreetly lit by natural light through a concealed skylight above. In front of the table you will see the communion rail also depicting flourishing Madonna lilies.



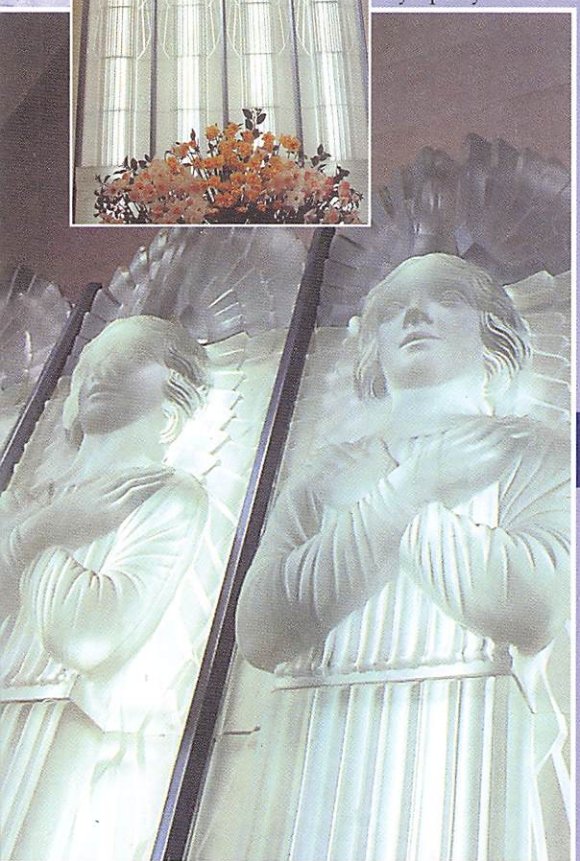
The Lady Chapel

The table in the Lady Chapel, is of similar construction to the main table but the reredos is strikingly different. Four angels preside, resplendent with wings, arm crossed over breasts. Visibility from the body of the church is impaired by the screen, but the vertical gaps in its construction afford glimpses of this truly remarkable piece. Identical angels can be viewed at closer quarters in the panels of the external main doors of the church.

The corresponding area to the right of the Chancel now houses the organ console, formerly situated on the balcony. This area was originally the sacristy and would, by comparison, be unremarkable except for one striking feature - its floor covering is of white leather, probably shark skin. Furthermore, the table is of white leather to match, sympathy with the rest of the church being achieved by its chrome legs. The reasons for the use of leather here are unclear but Lalique did incorporate leather in his early architectural work as a medium to enhance the reflection of the glass.

On each side of the church are angled recesses in the wall. These used to house the hymn boards during services, and are an unusual and interesting feature, the angle having been carefully worked out so that they could be read from all parts of the church.

As you turn to go down the aisle it is worth looking upwards to the ceiling to appreciate Lalique's use of art and design for practical as well as aesthetic purposes.



The Ceiling & Lights

Strip-lighting was innovative in the 1930's but Lalique realised its potential and used it to great effect not least in these ceiling lights, the only lighting for the main body of the church. Unconstrained by the dictates of previous ecclesiastical design or the awkwardness experienced by ancient churches when trying to install sympathetic electric lighting, Lalique created a suspended ceiling of plaster. Looking like stone in a series of barrelled concaves, each housed a moulded glass shade containing a fluorescent tube. The design was to bathe the church in a discreet, suffused light and

with the illuminated cross and pillars gives as restful a feeling to the church after dark as the sunlight through the glass windows gives an exuberant and joyful atmosphere by day. As one's gaze comes back down to the body of the church, observe the beautiful glass rail of the balcony, and beyond the often-missed north window. As you leave this part of the church you find yourself in the vestibule.

The Vestibule

By 1971, the original lobby needed to be replaced with a larger one. Mr Grayson had died in 1966, but Mr A. Le Sueur, a local architect, who had assisted Grayson in the original project in 1934, was asked to design a larger vestibule. Here you have the opportunity of observing and appreciating many details of the glass at closer quarters so it is worth spending a few moments here.

To your left, in niches, are further examples of the crowns of the pillars. These show, in high relief, the Madonna lily. The ones behind the communion table were originally topped with flames made of lily-buds, an example of which you can see inverted as a light shade above the east door. In the wall each side of the east door are two further niches containing wing-extension panels for the angels, originally used in the Paris Exhibition of 1933. Also of interest is the light globe which exemplifies Lalique's prediliction for fruit and mulberry leaves, a departure from the theme of the rest of the glass in the church and may have been an existing piece donated by Lalique. Indeed, much of the glass in this area has by necessity been 'borrowed' because of its much later inclusion. The windows are composed of spare panels which the church possessed in case of breakage, surrounded on the outside not by Portland stone, but by the much more easily obtainable local granite.

The glass panels in the various internal doors in this area are also worthy of comment. There was originally a large glass cross mounted on the exterior of the south side of the building, which came to be used as a waymark for shipping. To maximise the light these panels were of clear glass, not opaque like the rest of the glass you have seen and their design intensified the light. This heavy cross became unsafe and was removed, being replaced with the more lightweight cross which is there today, but the panels were used in the construction of these doors.

As you leave the church, pause a moment to admire the angels set as panels in the main oak doors which, to support their weight, are 15cm thick. The chip two-thirds of the way down the left-hand angel is said to have been caused by a Nazi gun being flung against it in a street fracas during the Occupation of Jersey in the Second World War.

Originally Lalique included two pink tinted globes surmounting the gate pillars. Unfortunately these were stolen and vandalised beyond repair in 2002.

The History of The Church

Until the early 19th century, the people of Millbrook who wished to worship had to make their way up the long, steep stretch of Mont Felard some two miles to the Parish Church of St. Lawrence. In the 1830's, the increasing coastal population and the rigours of such a walk deemed it desirable to build a new church and so St. Matthew's Church, a chapel of ease came into being, architecturally uninspiring and financially self-supporting then, as it is remains today.

The main building has altered little externally, the vestibule being its only substantial addition. Inside, however, nothing remains visible to the naked eye of its original design or furniture; only the plain wooden-slatted ceiling is still there, now hidden by the much more singular plaster vaulted ceiling cast in situ by French and Italian craftsmen at Lalique's instigation, which it supports with hundreds of metal rods. The stone font is long gone, and the only other remnants are two stained-glass windows, dedicated to former incumbents, which can be viewed, only from the outside, on either side of the east door of the vestibule, and the stone cross set into the boundary wall to the north which commemorates the church's original dedication, in 1840.

Thus the church, with its schoolroom on the south side, served the community in austere reverence until the death of Jesse Boot, first Lord Trent and founder of Boots The Chemist chain of stores. The schoolroom was converted into the Vicarage. Its emergence from architectural nonentity to uniqueness began with a friendship and respect which grew between two neighbours in the south of France. Florence, Lady Trent had commissioned the 'man next door', (René Lalique) to design and make two glass-panelled doors for her villa. Her delight in these panels coincided with his desire to branch out from vase and ornament work to grander interior design. She asked if he would refurbish the interior of a church in much need of attention which stood opposite Villa Millbrook, her home in Jersey. This was to be a tribute to the life of her husband, Jesse, and Lalique willingly accepted. The revolutionary yet serene celebration of the glory of God in glass which you have visited was born.

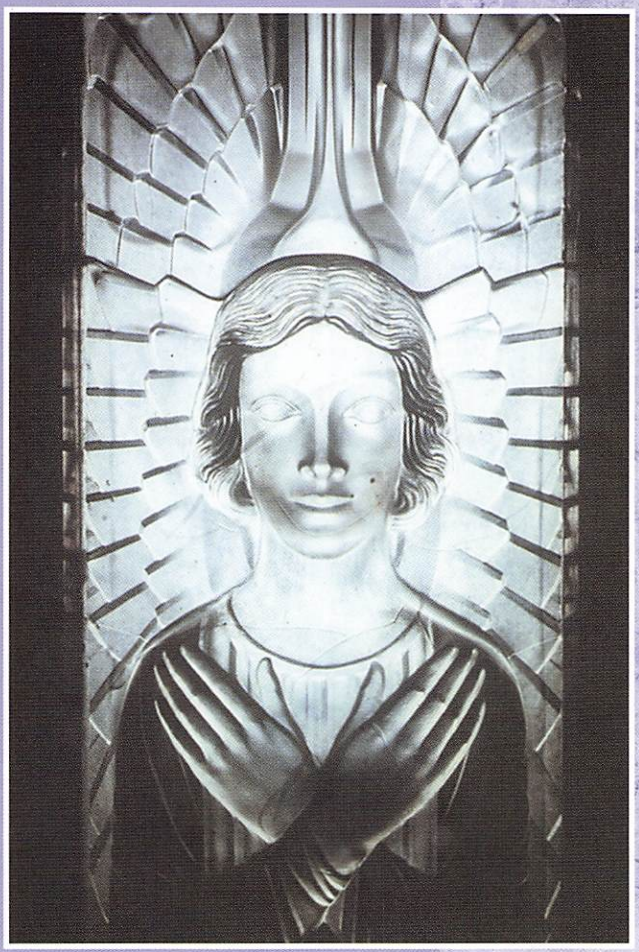
Lalique had already accepted the commission to redecorate La Chapelle de la Vierge Fidèle a la Deliverande at Calvados, in 1930. His work incorporated a magnificent cross and six pillars all topped with Madonna lilies, interspersed with six serene angels with crossed arms and high wings was put together to make a stunning rerdos for tabernacle, altar and fifteen-panel communion rail exhibited in the Paris exhibition of 1933 at the Pavillon de Marsan.

The fact that much of La Chapelle de la Vierge suffered much damage during the Second World War makes St. Matthew's Church unique in respect of this chapter of Lalique's work and is possibly the only church interior of any note in existence entirely the vision of one man preserved in its entirity.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the cross, pillars and angels were made especially for St. Matthew's Church or were examples of Lalique's ideas later incorporated into the church. The fact that the windows, which would have to be made especially to size, depict the Jersey rather than the Madonna lily, a tactful

consideration of local pride and interest, serves to strengthen the latter theory. Whichever it was, Lalique in conjunction with Grayson, embarked upon the refurbishment, completed and dedicated in September 1934, when Lalique was seventy-four years old.

Lalique's contribution is so imposing that it would be easy to overlook the contribution made by the architect, A. B. Grayson, and so further mention must be made of him. It was he who designed the gateway on the north side, and the interior appointments, including the oak pews, lectern, pulpit, and the stonework, in collaboration with the artist. A peal of eight bells was also installed in the tower. The general contractor for all building works was the local firm of Charles Le Quesne, who have since had a long association with the church, carrying out recent restoration work to the exterior of the church.



Little more remains to be said except that this memorial to Jesse Boot has also become a monument to the work of René Lalique, craftsman in glass, and has been preserved in their memory and to the glory of God by successive generations of worshippers. We hope not only that you have enjoyed this guided tour and history, but will also have seen that this church of God is not mere glass or stone, but also the people who attend each Sunday in praise, prayer and worship of God and the furthering of His kingdom. Lalique delighted in the illumination of his glasswork when it can be best appreciated. The cross, pillars and angel reredos are illuminated at all services. You are welcome to join us to thank God for the beauty he has created through us, at any of our services. Details of services are available in the vestibule.

"For He has made us only a little lower than the angels"
Psalm 8

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